

(Commercial)
116 Main Street (Sokol Club)
Bentleyville
Washington County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5384

HABS
PA,
63-BENT,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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Location: 116 Main Street, Bentleyville, Washington County, PA

USGS Ellsworth, Pennsylvania Quadrangle Universal
Transverse Mercator Coordinates 17.584280.4440280

Significance: The Bentleyville Sokol Club was established in the early 1920's under the sponsorship of the parent Slovak Gymnastic Union of the United States of America.

In 1923, the Club built the Sokol Hall owned by the local lodge #126 located at 116 Main Street, Bentleyville, Pennsylvania.

In order to do this, the local lodge borrowed \$17,000 from the parent Sokol of the United States of America. The loan was subsequently paid off in full amount by the local lodge.

In regards to the construction of the building, no professional architectural plans were ever used. The two story structure was designed and built by local lodge members skilled in various trades. The first or ground floor, which was divided into commercial space, was rented to proprietors of a butcher shop and a candy shop. The second floor was used as their Club Room and for various storage areas.

Several years after constructing the two story building, the lodge added a third floor which became the primary gymnasium serving the area. The gymnasium/social hall was regularly rented to teams playing in a wide variety of basketball

leagues including such notable ones as the Greater Pittsburgh League which held their championship games in the facility. Local high schools also used the facilities for basketball, and dances were frequently held at the Club.

Description: With regards to the construction of the building, nearly all the work was done by skilled laborers coming primarily from within the Club's membership. The one exception was checks paid to the Civolio Construction Company in the amount of \$2,862.16 for performance of certain construction work. The only records, photographs, etc. which were found were restricted to two ledger books which contained records of checks written from two banks covering a period from 1919 up until 1940. The payments to Civolio Construction Company were shown in this ledger and verified as full payment for their services by the Club's lone surviving officer, Steve Curilla. Although no architectural plans were ever developed, a Mr. N. H. Beck, architect, was paid a fee of \$241 to overlook the construction and advise the membership with regards to the construction of the facility.

The Sokol Club was constructed on a forty-four foot (44') wide lot which measured approximately one hundred feet (100') in length. A substantial portion of the rear of this lot, however, was comprised of a hillside which slopes away from the building. As the building was constructed, each upper floor extended deeper into the lot to conform to the slope of the steep bank. The resulting floors are not uniform in size.

The first floor measured forty feet (40') in width by forty-four feet (44') in length which took it from the sidewalks in front, to the bank in the rear.

The second floor measured forty feet (40') in width by fifty-four feet (54') in length. More area was

available because of the bank slope at the higher elevation.

Both floors had fourteen foot (14') ceilings.

The Club eventually added the third floor as a gymnasium and its dimensions varied even further. It was also forty feet (40') wide but ran a distance of eighty-two feet (82') to the rear into the upper part of the hill. The ceiling was nineteen feet (19') in height.

History: The building continued for many years to serve as a sort of recreation/social center for the area. The primary reason the Sokol Club constructed the gymnasium was to provide space and training quarters for competitive gymnastics, a very popular sport in this era. The Club sponsored kids for competition and bused them to meet in places like Cleveland, Washington, Newark and many local communities such as New Kensington, Butler and McKeesport. These costs were all subsidized through revenue from the bar trade and club memberships. Most of the Sokol Club revenue for many years went to support these activities and into the general maintenance of the building.

In the early sixties, the Club borrowed \$7,000 from the parent Sokol Gymnastic Union of the United States of America for repair and extension of their sewage lines. Part of this was repaid but the Club membership, which during its good years would normally exceed 400, began to drop drastically as the younger generations became less active in the Club and in most cases dropped out or elected not to join.

Eventually as the economy of the area declined and the principal officers in the Club died, the existing membership was just unable to maintain the Hall. The parent organization was made aware of this and the

mortgage on the sewer loan was written off as an uncollectable asset.

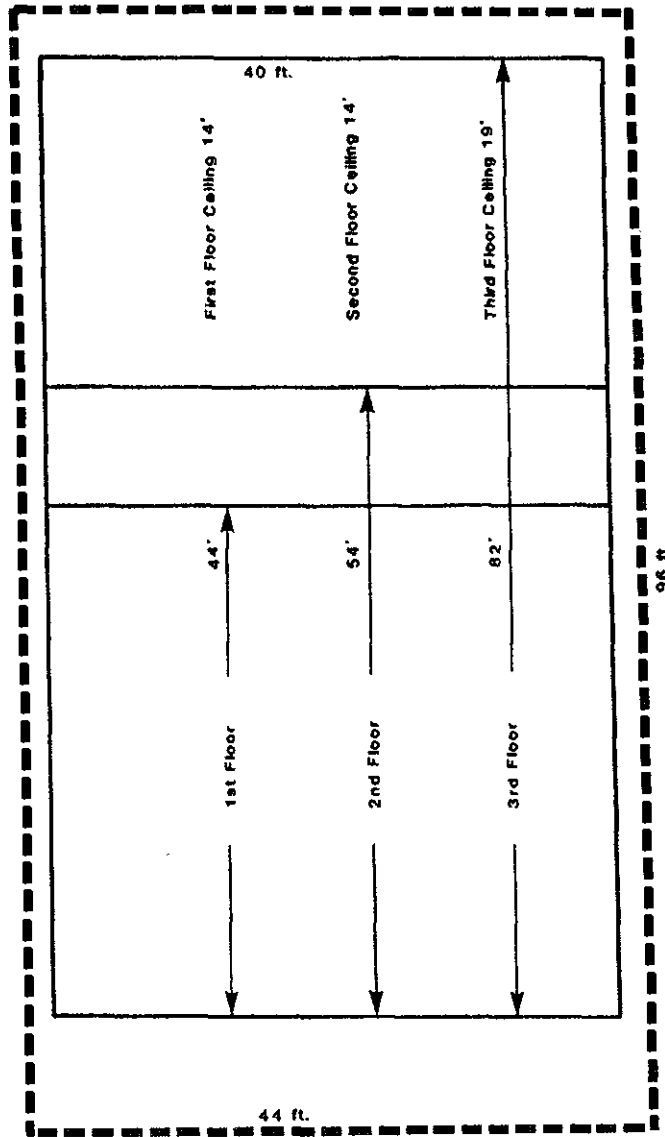
Finally, the Club's liquor license was not renewed and the doors were closed forever with the County eventually taking over the structure for taxes.

The only living member that served as an officer is Steve Curilla of Bentleyville. Mr. Curilla joined the Club around 1945 and served as its Secretary up until its closing. The few remaining local Sokol members, most of whom are quite elderly, may not be required to pay annual dues to the parent organization. The last known fee paid to the parent organization by a local member was in April of 1985.

Source: Mr. Steve Curilla, Secretary of the Sokol Club; and Sokol Club Records

Historian: Mr. Kyle Riggs
Redevelopment Authority of Washington County
October 12, 1989

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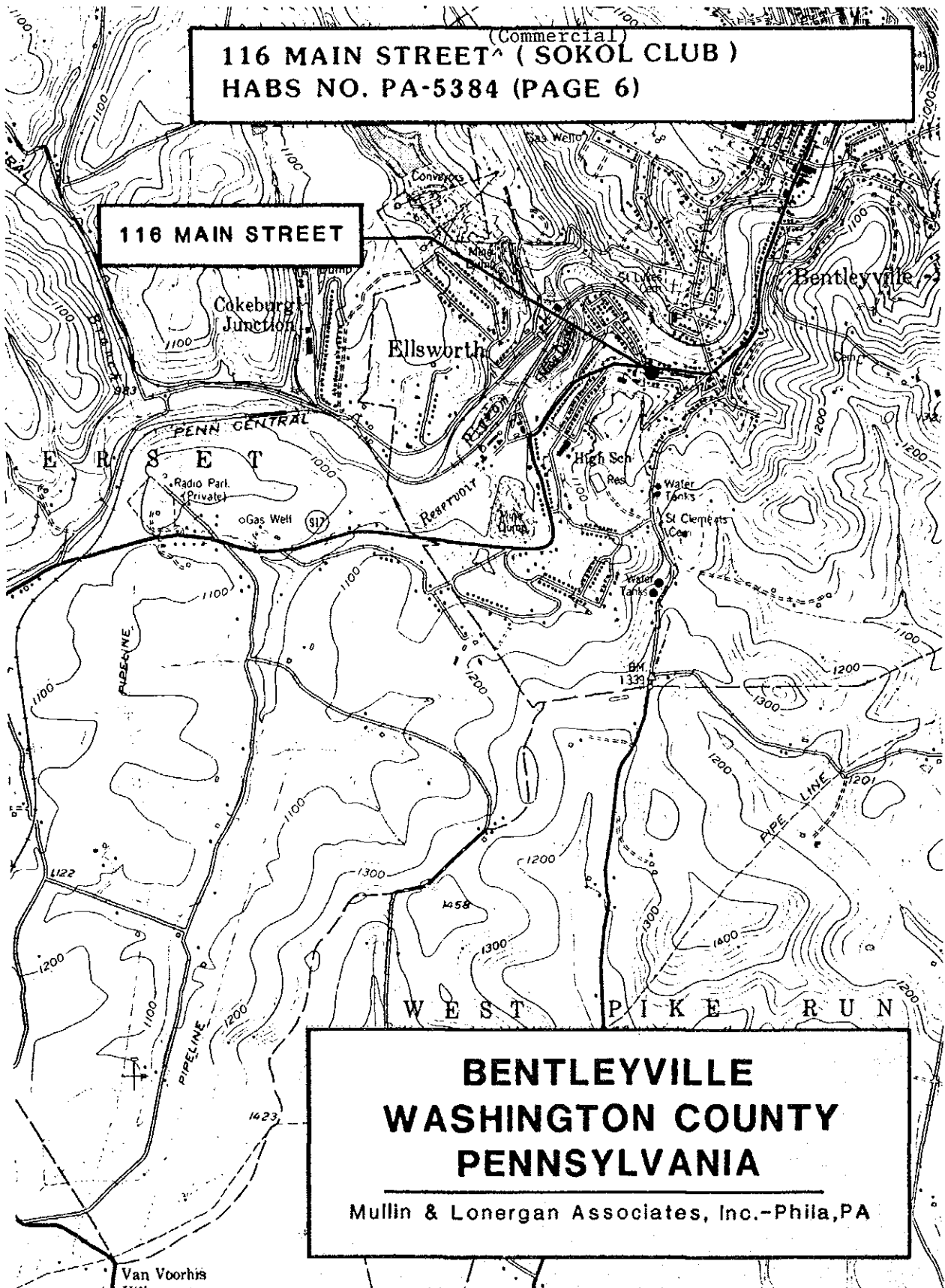


MAIN STREET



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116 MAIN STREET



BENTLEYVILLE
WASHINGTON COUNTY
PENNSYLVANIA

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